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ABSTRACT

A review of research on sex role differentiation in classroom interaction reveals that women are marginalized from education by its content and by the classroom interactional processes. Sex-role stereotyping exists in curriculum materials at all educational levels, with textbooks more likely to portray boys in active roles and girls in passive roles. More stories are about boys or are illustrated with boys' pictures than with girls' pictures. Little space is given to the achievements of women, and sexist language is common. In addition to curriculum materials, students are exposed to sex-role stereotyped materials and advice in guidance counseling offices. In the classroom, teachers communicate sex-role expectations in various ways, including use of sexist language, calling on male students more often than on female students, and asking male students questions requiring critical thinking or personal evaluation, while asking female students questions requiring factual answers. Criticism of female students focuses on their lack of knowledge or skill, whereas criticism of male students focuses on disruptive behaviors. Overall, male students dominate talk and space. In these ways, sexism in the educational environment affects the self-concepts of students, their curriculum choices, and their occupational choices. However, several communication researchers suggest strategies for change, such as (1) paying attention to classroom interaction patterns; (2) using terminology that includes both males and females in the group; (3) responding to male and female students in the same way; and (4) intervening in communication patterns that shut out females. (A student-faculty communication checklist, teachers' self-evaluation questionnaire, student perception questionnaire and 33 footnotes are appended.) (MM)

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In or Out of the Pumpkin Shell? Sex Role Differentiation in Classroom Interaction

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Abstract

This paper reviews research on sex role differentiation in classroom interaction. Strategies for change are outlined and discussed.

Note: A form of this paper will appear in Pamela Cooper, Speech Communication for the Classroom Teacher, 3rd ed. (Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch-Scarisbrick, 1988).

INTRODUCTION

Much research indicates the negative effects of sexism in the classroom.[1] Even a cursory review of research indicates gender differences for teachers and students. Male students receive more praise, more academic response opportunities, more instruction, lower grades and more contact with teachers generally than do female students.[2] In addition, several studies indicate that teachers (regardless of their sex): [3]

1. Use a harsh tone when reprimanding boys and a conversational tone when reprimanding girls
2. Reprimand boys more often than girls
3. Respond to a girl's reading failure by providing a second response
4. Overestimate the achievement levels of girls and underestimate achievement levels for boys
5. Have more negative attitudes toward boys in terms of their potential for disruptive behavior and school motivation

In addition, females are discouraged from pursuing such "masculine" subjects as math, and males have difficulty with "feminine" subjects such as reading.[4]

Differences have also been found in male and female teachers' classrooms. As Brophy and Good indicate in their research review:

> First, the female teachers' classes seemed to be more active, with greater student willingness to intiate interaction with the teachers. Students initiated more comments and questions in the female teachers' classes, had more response opportunities, and initiated more private contacts with teachers. Also, they

were more likely to remain silent in a male teacher's classroom. Thus, the students apparently felt safer in guessing in the female teachers' classes.[5]

Brophy and Good go on to say:

> Male teachers more often failed to give feedback to students, but this happened mostly after correct or part-correct answers. Female teachers, in contrast, more often failed to give feedback after the student had responded incorrectly or had failed to answer. Following wrong answers or failures to respond, male teachers were more likely to provide process feedback to give explanations, or clear up the student's misunderstanding. In general, in failure situations male teachers were more likely to provide abstract feedback or to provide a sscond response opportunity by asking another question, while female teachers were more likely to give the answer or call on someone else. [6]

In their extensive research review, Hall and Sandler [7] found several ways in which teachers treat male and female students differently, and thus reinforce traditional sex-role stereotypes. They do this by:

- making eye contact more often with males than with females
- nodding and gesturing more often in response to males' questions and comments than to females'
- assuming a posture of attentiveness (for example, leaning forward) when men speak, but the opposite (such as looking at the clock) when women make comments
- habitually choosing a location near male students (Proximity in the classroom may invite comments primarily from those

sitting close by.)

. giving males detailed instructions in how to complete a particular problem or lab assignment with the expectation they will eventually succeed on their own, but doing the assignment for females--or allowing them to fail with less instruction

. ignoring female students while recognizing male students, even when women clearly volunteer to participate in class

. calling directly on male students but not on female students

. calling male students by name more often than female students

. "coaching" males but not female students in working toward a fuller answer by probing for additional elaboration or explanation

. waiting longer for males than for females to answer a question before going on to another student

. interrupting female students (or allowing them to be disproportionately interrupted by peers)

. asking female students questions that require factual answers (lower-order questions) while asking male students questions that demand personal evaluation and critical thinking (higher-order questions)

. responding more extensively to males' comments than to females' comments

. crediting males' comments to the speaker ("as Bill pointed out") but not giving credit to females for their comments

. phrasing classroom examples in a way that reinforces a stereotyped and negative view of females' psychological traits

. using classroom examples that reflect stereotyped ideas about males' and females' social and professional roles

. using the generic "he"or "man" to represent both males and females

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION

It is generally accepted that males and females communicate differently and that these communication differences may be carried into the classroom. Research [8] demonstrates that in groups containing both males and female, males:

. talk more, and what they say carries more weight

. talk for longer periods of time

. take more turns at speaking

. exert more control over the topic of conversation

. interrupt females more frequently than females interrupt males

Females are more likely to use "correct" linguistic forms, intensifying adjectives and adverbs, references to self, and incomplete assertions, and they interpret nonverbal cues more effectively than males. [8] In terms of communication style, males tend to be more dominant in conversation, to be more relaxed, to argue more, and to be more dramatic and more precise. Females tend to be more friendly and attentive (employing smiling, head nods, positive reactions), and more open and animated in their display of feelings and emotions. [10]

In 1974, Bem [11] published her concept of androgeny--a psychological identification of sex. Androgenous individuals, regardless of their biological sex, identify with both "masculine" characteristics (aggressiveness, independence, dominance and so on) and "feminine" characteristics (sensitivity, expressiveness, dependence and so forth). As a result, androgenous individuals are more adaptable and more free from pressure to restrict their social behavior to stereotyped sex roles.

In terms of communication competence, androgenous individuals demonstrate a high level of adaptability (ability to be flexible and feel comfortable with a variety of people) and rewarding impressions (being other-oriented and providing positive feelings towards others). Generally adaptability is associated with "maleness" and rewarding impressions with "femaleness." An individual who identifies with both masculine and feminine characteristics is generally a more competent communicator than an individual who identifies with only male or only female characteristics. [12]

Findings such as those just outlined have far-rearching implications for classroom teachers. For example, Rosenfeld and Jarrard [13] examined how the perceived sexism of professors affected classroom climate. They found that classes of perceived high sexist male teachers were described as less supportive, and less innovative than those of perceived nonsexist male teachers. In a follow-up study, the researchers examined coping mechanisms used by students in classes taught by sexist and nonsexist teachers. Coping mechanisms used by students in sexist male teacher's classes were passive (not doing what the teacher asks, and hiding feelings) when students liked the class. If students did not like the class, and perceived the male teacher as sexist, students used an active coping mechanism -- forming alliances against the teacher. Generally, teachers in disliked classes were perceived as more sexist than teachers in liked classes. Also, male teachers were perceived as more sexist than female teachers. [14]

Often neither students nor teachers are aware of these gender differences. Sexism is a two-edged sword--harming both males and females -- and teachers may inadvertently communicate their own sex-role biases to students. Students may in turn model the sexist behavior of their teachers. Thus teachers are a significant element in the development and continuation of sexism. [15] On the other hand, students may model the nonsexist behaviors of their teachers. As a result, teachers can also be a significant element in the prevention of sexism.

SEXIST CURRICULUM MATERIALS

Not only teacher behaviors but also the curriculum materials teachers use can perpetuate sex-role stereotypes. From the preschool level on, students are exposed to sexist material. For example, Weitzman and their associates [16] examined how sex roles were treated in the Caldecott Medal and Newbery Award winning books. The Caldecott Medal is given by the Children's Service Committee of the American Library Association for the most distinguished picture book of the year. The Newbery Award is sponsored by the American Library Association for the best book for school-age children. The eighteen Caldecott winners and runners-up from 1967 to 1972 were analyzed in Weitzman's study. The researchers found that the ratio of pictured males to pictured females was 11:1. When females were illustrated, their traditional sex-role characterizations were reinforced: girls are passive, boys active; girls follow and serve others, boys lead and rescue others. Adult men and women in these books were also sex stereotyped: women were presented as wives and mothers; men in a variety of occupations. Newbery Award winners didn't fare much better. The ratio of male-to-female main characters was 3:1.

In an update of the Weitzman, et al. study, Kolbe and LaVoie [17] analyzed Caldecott winners from 1972 to 1979. Although the ratio of male-to-female pictures had improved drastically (1.8:1), the role portrayal of males and females had not. Female roles continued to be stereotypically portrayed. Cooper's [18] research of Caldecott and Newbery Winners from 1980-1987 showed similar results to the Weitzman and Kolbe and La Voie studies, as did her research of the images of parents and stepparents in children's literature. [19]

Since the lack of female characters can communicate that females are unimportant in society, these ratios are disturbing. However, even more

problematic is the way in which females were portrayed. For the most part, women and girls were portrayed as emotional, fearful, and incompetent (relying on others to solve their problems and comfort them.) They were constantly concerned with their appearance and spent the majority of their time cooking, sewing, or watching as boys played sports, made things, solved problems, or experienced adventures. They often demeaned themselves and accepted ridicule from boys. Boys, on the other hand, were portrayed as clever, adventurous, and brave.

Weitzman and Rizzo [20] studied the most used elementary school textbooks in grades one through six and found that males and females were portrayed stereotypically, particularly in the illustrations. In science texts, females appeared in only 26 percent of the illustrations. In social studies texts, 33 percent of the illustrations included females. In a reading series, 102 stories were about boys and only 35 were about girls. Math texts pictured the mathematically competent boy and the mathematically incompetent female. Such illustrations present negative images for females and communicate what is considered "appropriate" behavior for each sex.

Secondary textbooks do not appear to be much better. The typical history text devotes one of its 500 to 800 pages to women and their achievements. [21] In a survey of English literature textbooks, the 171 anthologized selections included 147 male authors and 24 female authors. Another survey of 400 selections counted 74 female authors and 306 male authors. [22] Apparently many subject matter areas are sex biased since studies of math, science, and social studies texts reveal similar results.[23]

Apple suggests that educators will see little change in textbooks as long as sex-typing in the division of labor in publishing continues. Although the number of women who have moved into important editorial positions has increased, women are still not as evident as men in positions that actually exercise control over the goals and policy of publishing. [24]

THE EFFECTS OF SEXISM

One might ask, "So what? What effect does sexist curriculum material have on students?" Much research suggests that these materials influence student sex-role stereotypes and behavior. [25] Of particular interest to communication education scholars is the effect of sexism on student self-concept.

In a study comparing the self-concept scores of tenth-grade girls with the scores of their male peers, Bohan [26] found girls had a significantly lower self-concept rating than did males. Tenth-grade girls also showed significantly lower self-concept scores than girls in all other age groups. Bohan posits two interpretations for these findings: (1) that the adolescent years involve a reevaluation of self, and it may be that adolescent girls find themselves wanting in relation to the values they hold or believe to be important; (2) since adolescence is the period of the most intense role evaluation as well as the apex of sex-role development, the adolescent girl may come to recognize that the role she is expected to assume as a female is relatively inferior in status and prestige to the male role. Accordingly, she may decrease her evaluation of herself.[27]

Equally as disconcerting as the decline in the self-concept of adolescent girls are test results that seem to indicate that these girls decrease in their IQ scores while boys increase. [28] Studies indicate that girls with better grade averages than boys in high school generally do not believe that they have the ability to do college work. Of the brightest high school graduates who do not go on to college, 75 to 90 percent are women.[29]

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

The first step to eliminating sexism in our classrooms is awareness of our behavior. Asking our students to complete a questionnaire like the "Student

Perception Questionnaire" in the Appendix could tell us a great deal about our teaching behavior as it relates to our students' biological sex.

In addition to using student evaluations, we can ask colleagues to observe our classroooms or we can videotape our classroom interactions to help analyze how we relate to our students on the basis of gender. (See the "Student- Faculty Communication Checklist" in the Appendix).

To become aware of how we may inadvertently be perpetuating sex-role stereotypes, we also need to model the nonsexist behavior we wish our students to develop. For example, if we avoid using sexist language such as the generic "he", our students may begin to model this behavior. [30] Since research suggests that the classroom is a "chilly" climate for females, we need to concentrate on creating a climate that will encourage females to communicate. Hall and Sandler [31] make the following recommendations:

1. Pay particular attention to classroom interaction patterns during the first few weeks of class, and make a special effort to draw females into discussion during that time. Participation patterns are likely to be established during this period that often continue throughout the term.
2. Make a specific effort to call directly on females as well as on male students.
3. In addressing the class, use terminology that includes both males and females in the group.
4. Respond to female and to male students in similar ways when they make comparable contributions to class discussion by:
   a. crediting comments to their author ("as Jeanne said...")
   b. "coaching" for additional information
5. Intervene in communication patterns among students that may shut out females. For example, if male students pick up on each

other's points, but ignore an appropriate comment offered by a female, slow the discussion, and pick up on the comment that has been overlooked.

6. Note patterns of interruption to determine if female students are interrupted more than males -- either by yourself or by other students. Make a special effort to ensure that all students have the opportunity to finish their comments.
7. Ask females and males qualitatively similar questions -- that is, ask students of both sexes critical as well as factual questions.
8. Give male and female students an equal amount of time to respond after asking a question.
9. Give females and males the same opportunity to ask for and receive detailed instructions about the requirements for an assignment.
10. When talking about occupations or professions in class discussion, use language that does not reinforce limited views of male and female role and career choices.
11. Avoid using the generic "he" whenever possible.
12. Avoid placing professional women in a "special category," for example, "woman (or worse, 'lady') doctor."
13. Make eye contact with females as well as with male students after asking a question to invite a response.
14. Watch for and respond to nonverbal cues that indicate female students' readiness to participate in class, such as leaning forward or making eye contact.
15. Use the same tone in talking with female as with male students (for example, avoid a patronizing or impatient tone when speaking with females, but a tone of interest and attention

when talking with males.)

16. Finally, eliminate sexist materials from your curriculum.

As Sprague points out:

> As long as teachers rely solely on existiang teaching materials and linguistic codes, women will be discouraged from exploring the independent, assertive, forceful aspects of their personalities while men will be discouraged from exploring the tenderness, dependence, and compliance that is part of them as human beings. Women will have trouble considering the role of engineer, senator,or laborer, and men will find it difficult to consider seriously how they might fit into roles such as nurse, partner in home tasks, or elementary teacher. Unless students of both sexes display a variety of individual personality styles and careers, their self-concepts and their human potential will be limited. [32]

CONCLUSION

Women are marginalized from education by its content and by the classroom interactional processes. Sex-role stereotyping exists in curriculum materials at all educational levels. Textbooks are more likely to portray boys in active roles and girls in passive roles. More stories are about boys or are illustrated with boys' pictures than with girls' pictures. Little space is given to the achievements of women. Sexist language is common.

In addition to curriculum materials, students are exposed to sex-role stereotyped materials and advice in guidance counseling offices. Counselors encourage students to pursue traditional sex-role stereotyped occupations. High

school counselors may recommend occupations for female high-school students that pay less, are more highly supervised, and require less education than those recommended for male students.

In the classroom, teachers communicate sex-role expectations to students. Teachers may call on male students more often than on female students. Teachers often coach male students to help them develop fuller answers. Waiting longer for male students than for female students to answer questions may communicate to female students that they are not expected to know the answer. Female students are more likely to be asked questions requiring factual answers while male students are more often asked questions that require critical thinking or personal evaluation. Teachers respond more extensively to male students' comments than to female students' comments. Finally, teachers may communicate sex-role stereotypes by their use of sexist language.

Classroom interactions vary by sex in terms of initiation, discipline, and dominance. Male students initiate more interactions with teachers than female students do. Criticism of female students focuses on their lack of knowledge or skill, whereas criticism of male students focuses on disruptive behaviors. Overall, male students dominate classroom talk and space.

Sexism in the educational environment affects the self-concepts of students, their curriculum choices, and their occupational choices. In the educational environment, women generally lack self-confidence. Males and females do not take courses they perceive to be the domain of the opposite sex. Because of these curriculum choices, women usually do not enter traditionally male-dominated fields, and men usually do not enter traditionally female-dominated fields.

Teachers are perhaps the primary agents for changing the sex-role stereotyping that exists in American education. One of the ways in which teachers can help to eliminate sex-role stereotyping is by modeling nonsexist behaviors. Teachers can promote equality in interaction between the sexes by integrating

teams, lines, seating arrangements, and instructional groups. Finally, teachers can eliminate sexist materials from their curricula.

In their recent report Earle, Roasch, and Fraser suggest that successful programs to discourage the drop-out rate of girls include the following:

1. Instructional strategies incorporating the group acitivies and collaboration that complement female cognitive development.
2. Remedial instruction (if needed) in abstract spatial reaasoning to prepare girls to enroll in math and science courses.
3. Institutional encouragement for girls to enroll in math, science, and other non-traditional courses.
4. An institutionalized mentor program which provides girls with the opportunity to identify with female role models who have nontraditional occupations.
5. A school environment which is flexible enough to accommodate students' individual learning and service needs,
6. Adequate teacher training, to promote teacher-student interactions that are free of sex and race bias.
7. Extracurricular activities that highlight girls as key participants rather than supportive elements to a male-dominated activity.
8. Counseling and related activities (when needed) to enhance girls' self-esteem.
9. Parent counseling/education on cultural stereotypes and female kpotential.
10. In general, access to and coordination of a range of services to help the variety of girls who are at-risk of dropping out of school. [33]

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APPENDICES

Student-Faculty Communication Checklist

It may be difficult for an instructor to be conscious of the interactional dynamics in the classroom while transmitting a lecture or guiding a discussion. For this reason, the following techniques are suggested to help faculty analyze the interaction in their classes.

A. Classroom Observation

Having a friend, colleague, or teaching assistant observe some of your classes on a random basis can be helpful. Classroom observation can be used to answer questions such as:

1. How many males do you call on to answer questions? How many females?
2. Which students (male or female) participate in class more frequently through answering questions or making comments? Is the number disproportionate enough that you should encourage some students to participate more frequently?
3. Do interruptions occur when an individual is talking? If so, who does the interrupting?
4. Is your verbal response to students positive? aversive? encouraging? Is it the same for all students? If not, why? (Valid reasons occur from time to time for reacting or responding to a particular student in a highly specified manner).
5. Do you tend to face or address one section of the classroom more than others? Do you establish eye contact with certain students more than others? What gestures, postures, or facial expressions do you use and are they different for men, women, or minority students?

B. Audiotaping of Class Section

Have a student tape record some of your class sessions. Self-analysis of the tapes could provide answers to questions such as:

1. Which students do you call by name?
2. What language patterns are you using? Do you regularly use male referencing or the generic "he" or "man"? Are stereotypical assumptions about men and women revealed in your classroom dialogue?
3. Are examples and anecdotes drawn from men's lives only?
4. Can differential patterns of reinforcement be detected from the tapes?

From Gappa and Pearce, Sex and Gender in the Social Sciences.

Teachers' Self Evaluation Questionnaire

To increase your awareness of stereotypes, spend some time observing your behavior in the classroom and then complete the questionnaire.

1. Do you group children according to gender and/or pit one gender against the other in competition?
2. Do you make value judgments about children based on their appearances? (For example, do you disapprove of boys that wear heels, or that have long hair--or of girls that wear jeans or are unconcerned with their appearances?)
3. Do you expect behavioral differences in boys and girls? (Do you expect boys to be loud and rough and girls to be more quiet and gentle?)
4. Do you expect differences in the academic preferences of boys and girls? (Do you feel boys favor math and science and girls prefer reading and art?)
5. Do you emphasize the attractiveness of girls and the strength and abilities of boys?
6. Do you make an effort to change sex-stereotyped material that you must use in the classroom? (Do you change the gender of main characters in stereotyped books and involve the class in rewriting stereotyped material? Do you draw attention to stereotyped statements?)
7. Do you make an effort to free your language from sexist terminology? (Do you try to refrain from using male terms for all humanity or when referring to a teacher in the abstract; do you use the pronouns she and her?)
8. Do you discipline boys more harshly than girls?
9. Do you give boys more instructional time?
10. Do you involve fathers as much as mothers in your communication with the child's home? (For example, do you schedule parent/teacher conferences when fathers are available?

11. Do you do all you can to see that all extracurricular activities include with boys and girls together?

12. Do you use resource people in the classroom to show changes in sex roles? (Do you demonstrate such role reversals as a woman changing a tire, a father changing a diaper, a woman carpenter, a male librarian, a mother and father who both work outside the home and how they share household maintenance?)

13. Do you supplement your classes with current material on new openings in careers for males and females?

14. Do you call on only boys to do chores involving strength? (For example, carrying stacks of books or moving tables)

15. Do you encourage dominant roles for girls as well as boys? (Do you place girls in leadership positions? encourage boys to follow and receive help from girls?)

16. Do you encourage friendships between the sexes? (Do you assign joint projects and group the class according to interests?)

17. Do you write publishers to complain when material you receive does not treat the sexes fairly or equally?

18. Do you encourage all children to use a variety of materials for recreation and learning? (Are bats and balls, dolls, trucks, hammers, jump ropes, measuring cups and spoons, and so on equally available to boys and girls?)

19. Do you encourage all children to try a variety of roles in play? (parent, fire fighter, truck driver, cook, and so on)

20. Do you encourage all children to try a variety of enrichment activities? (For example, do you encourage girls to learn to play the drums and boys to learn gymnastics or ballet?)

21. Do you accept and encourage an equal display of anger and pain in boys and girls? (Do you accept it when girls hit and fight and when boys cry?)

22. Are there specific classroom areas for boys and girls to play in (whether labeled as such or not)? For example, do you have a housekeeping area with kitchen toys for girls and a construction area for boys, or a separate book section for boys' books or girls' books? What happens when boy heads for the kitchen corner or reads girls' books? Or when the girls head for the construction corner? (Note the students' response; note your own.)

23. Do you plan different activities, or different roles within an activity?

Student Perception Questionnaire

Directions: Answer each of the following questions. Choose only one answer for each question.

1. Sex of Student

   (1) Male

   (2) Female

2. Sex of Instructor

   (1) Male

   (2) Female

3. How often do you voluntarily answer questions or contribute to class discussions in class:

   (1) Never

   (2) One to three times during the course

   (3) An average of once a week

   (4) An average of two to three times a week

   (5) An average of one or more times a day

4. How often does the teacher call on you or ask you to respond to a question or comment?

   (1) Teacher does not call on anyone

   (2) One to three times during the course

   (3) An average of once a week

   (4) An average of two to three times a week

   (5) Never

5. How does the teacher most frequently call on you?

   (1) By name

   (2) By pointing

   (3) By eye contact/looking directly at me

   (4) Teacher never calls on me

6. How many times have you raised your hand to ask a question or make a comment and found that the teacher does not respond?

   (1) Once or twice during the course

   (2) Three or more times during the course

   (3) I am called on when I raise my hand

   (4) I never raise my hand

7. Why do you think the teacher does not respond when you raise your hand? (Select the one answer which best reflects your opinion.)

   (1) Too many students want to speak

   (2) Others beat me to it

   (3) Teacher does not see or hear me

   (4) Teacher ignores me

   (5) This situation never occurs

8. How many times have you wanted to participate in class by asking a question or making a comment but chosen not do do so?

   (1) Once or twice during the course

   (2) Three or more times during the course

   (3) Nearly every day

   (4) Not at all, because I participate when I want to

   (5) I usually do not want to participate

Interview young children (younger than age ten) and assess the level of sex-role stereotyping in their self-concepts. Have them answer questions such as: (1) How do they play? With whom? (2) What do they want to be when they grow up? (3) What is their role in the family? (4) Who are their heroes?